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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to create a guide for beginning coaches of the "communication analysis" event in forensics and to attempt to arouse interest in the activity. According to the paper, the American Forensic Association defines communication analysis as an original speech designed to offer an explanation and/or evaluation of a communication event such as a speech, speaker, movement, poem, poster, film, campaign, etc. through the use of rhetorical principles. The paper also helps coaches set up a system for researching topics and methodologies and offers tips for critically evaluating the communication analysis event. The paper concludes that it is time to renew interest and participation in the study and exploration of rhetorical criticism. Contains references. Handouts for students, teachers, and coaches on learning the basics of rhetorical criticism, choosing a topic, selecting a methodology, sample formats, and judging a communication analysis, are attached. (RS)

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Coaching the 'Critters'

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to create a guide for beginning coaches of the communication analysis event by attempting to arouse interest in the activity, helping coaches set up a system for researching topics and methodologies, and finally offering tips for critically evaluating this event. A detailed handout is available for student distribution as well as practical reference guides. It is time to renew interest and participation in the study and exploration of rhetorical criticism.
(76 words)

"Criticism serves the function of
Adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas."
(Donald C. Bryant, Phd.)

Why did the books Heather has Two Mommies and Daddy's Roommate create such an uprising in New York City in 1992? Why does the holocaust museum go to great lengths to re-create the feeling of traveling to a concentration camp in a cattle car? The students that chose to answer these questions were among hundreds of contestants around the nation in 1993-1994 who participated in the American Forensic Association's individual event known as communication analysis (CA). The American Forensic Association (AFA) defines Communication Analysis as an original speech designed to offer an explanation and/or evaluation of a communication event such as a speech, speaker, movement, poem, poster, film, campaign, etc., through the use of rhetorical principles. Audio visuals may or may not be used to supplement and reinforce the message. Manuscripts are permitted. Maximum time limit is 10 minutes (AFA-NIET Invitation, 1994). While entries at this years national tournament were strong, local tournaments are still having a difficult time enticing students to enter this event. On the east coast, entries in this event rarely exceeds 12 competitors. One explanation for limited entries may be that a growing population of participants, coaches and students, do not have a background in communication theory. Another explanation may be the demand for revisions and the difficulty of re-memorizing the text. The last explanation may be that students lack the desire to undertake one of the more complex platform events. Whatever the reason, it is time to renew interest and participation in the study and exploration of rhetorical criticism. After all, "the study of rhetorical criticism has been a dominant form of communication study since the beginning of the twentieth century" (Bartanen, 1994, p. 84). It should not be thought of as an antiquated event, rather it is an exciting event worthy of our analysis. The purpose of this paper is to open the pages of criticism by first, attempting to arouse interest in the event, then helping coaches set up a system for researching topics and methodologies, and finally offering tips for critically evaluating a communication analysis.

Before coaches can entice students to write criticisms, they must be excited about the event. Communication Analysis' do not have to be the painfully boring speeches of the past. One of the purposes AFA had for changing the title of the event was to expand the types of artifacts that were being analyzed. No longer are competitor's limited to analyzing the speech, speaker, and audience. The inclusion of artifacts such as film, advertising, cartoons, buildings, and the electronic media offer direct correlations to the lives of forensicators. Cartoons promoting gun control legislation, explaining why Nike Town is so successful, why Barbie still represents the American dream, and showing the impact "Schindler's List" has on reviving the memories of World War II are excellent reflections on society and what part communication plays in the imprinting of the messages in the American psyche. If the topics are interesting everyone will enjoy working with the speeches. Relevancy and novelty seem to be an underlying theme of successful CA's. coaches need to encourage students to search for interesting topics and methodologies. There is nothing wrong with a traditional topic if students search for a newer method of analysis. This is an opportunity for students to begin their research in the field of communication--help them make it meaningful. It is exciting to coach students when learning is reciprocal.

Once there is a general interest in teaching CA, expanding general knowledge of criticism becomes a pleasant project rather than a chore. While many forensics coaches have a background in communication theory there is a growing population of coaches who do not. With a wide field of study to chose from, not all graduates have a background in rhetorical studies. Budget cuts have forced some programs to be student run, where there is no guidance. Other programs have been fortunate enough to hire adjunct faculty who are willing to coach most events, but again lack the experience in the communication discipline. And, beginning coaches may simply need additional resources to provide the advantages of a specialized library to their students. Following are five categories of resources that can be tapped when gathering criticism information other than the university library.

1. Dust off those old graduate notes or somebody else's! Remember all of that intense studying and researching that was done. There is finally a purpose for it! Revive that precis! Even if coaches do not have a background in criticism, try soliciting people who do have the experience. Most criticism professors will have stacks of old handouts or articles they can share. Also, old editions of criticism books are a gold mine when trying to build a forensic library.

2. Call book representatives. Even if you are not teaching a criticism course, they are usually very helpful about providing free desk copies. Ask them for criticism books from Speech and Mass communication, Psychology, English, and Popular Culture. Some books you might ask for include:

Brummett, B. (1994). Rhetoric in popular culture. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Enos, T. & Brown, S. C. (Eds). (1994). Professing the new rhetorics: A sourcebook. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Foss, S. K. (1989). Rhetorical criticism: Exploration and practice. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Foss, S.K., Foss, K. A., & Trapp, R. (1991). Contemporary perspectives in rhetoric. (2 ed.). Prospect Heights: Waveland Press.

Hart, R. P. (1989). Modern rhetorical criticism. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman.

Littlejohn, S. W. (1992). Theories of human communication, (4 ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Rybacki, K. & Rybacki D. (1991). Communication criticism: Approaches and genres. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co.

Scott, R. L. & Brock, B. (1972). Methods of rhetorical criticism: A twentieth century perspective. New York: Harper & Row.

There are many other books available, however, these books are user friendly. The summaries of methodologies are most helpful to students who have a hard time reading complex journal articles. Some of the more traditional texts (not listed) offer in depth explanations and examples of criticisms that may prove helpful. If traditional works are chosen be careful not to get swallowed up by the language of the texts.

3. Start a filing system with different articles on criticism. Most methodologies are not found in textbooks. It is necessary to go to the professional journals and search for relevant models and theories. Matlon's Index to Journals in Communication Studies is a great place to start. Copy some of the key works from communication journals. This offers coaches an adequate starting point. Some articles worth looking up are:

Bormann, E. (1972). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58, 396-401.

Bormann, E. (1982). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: Ten years later. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 68, 288-305.

Cathcart, R. (1972). New approaches to the study of movements: Defining movements rhetorically. Western Speech Communication Journal, 36, 82-88.

Fisher, W. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case for public moral argument. Communication Monographs, 51, 1-19.

Griffin, L. (1952). The rhetoric of historical movements. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 38, 184-188.

Rowland, R. (1988). The value of the rational world and narrative paradigms. Central States Speech Journal, 39, 204-217.

Vanderford, M. L. (1989). Vilification and social movements: a case study of pro-life and pro-choice rhetoric. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 75, 166-182.

After a few students have competed in the event, coaches can build their library. Also, volunteering to judge CA has its advantages. Coaches can gather ideas from each other.

4. Ask for help. Each person in the department has a specialty. Ask the political rhetorician to help with campaign speeches. Ask the professor of persuasion to help with advertising. When necessary go outside the department and ask the experts in English or the Political Science department for their advice. This tip serves three specific purposes. First of all, it is beneficial to students to get the best advice possible. Second, it promotes forensics. It gets more people involved and increases awareness of the activity. Third, it offers a non-competitive perspective. Having objective listeners brings fresh perspectives to a Communication Analysis. Obviously, the best way to familiarize oneself with methodologies is to read. Taking the time to

read one article a month will help teams and coaches develop an appreciation for writing criticisms.

5. Create a handout on how to do a CA that would be specific to your students and their resources. Hindman, Shackelford, & Sclottach in their text Working Forensics: A Competitor's Guide 2nd Edition provide a wonderfully detailed description of how to write a CA. Also, there is a handout in the appendix which was used at the Washington Area Forensics Workshop in 1993. It should be noted that there is no perfect organizational method for CA. In fact, the organizational method is dependent on what speakers want to emphasize. Speakers should ask themselves if the speech, speaker, or artifact is more or less important than the communication model used for analysis? Then they should take a general organizational scheme and adapt it to their style of performance and towards the direction of the research question.

Finally, knowing what to cover in a Communication Analysis is not all there is to producing a solid piece of work. Since it is not possible to prove that the conclusions of the communication act are right or wrong, coaches and contestants, must find additional standards for judging the event. Sonja Foss's stance on criticism is a starting point for all judges whether they are experienced in the process of rhetorical criticism or are just beginning to be exposed to the field. In her book Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice, (1989), Foss espouses four standards for criticism they are; argumentation, coherence, acknowledgement of subjectivity, and presentation of choice. These elements provide standards for judgment in competition and guidelines for developing speeches.

Argumentation. Foss states, "since the critic cannot verify the various dimensions and qualities of an artifact objectively, the critics task in writing criticism cannot be to describe what the artifact is "really" like. Instead, the critic offers reasons for or argues in support of the claims made" (24). Just like a persuasive speech, the speaker must have sound arguments and be able to back them up either with outside evidence or with examples from the speaker, speech or artifact. There are many different argument models people can use to figure out if claims are well grounded. However, there is very little time to diagram an argument while listening to a speech.

So, if critics, coaches and students, ask themselves a few questions during the speech, it may replace the need for diagramming. There are two specific questions to ask: "Have the arguments been sufficiently supported with the best available evidence?" and, "Has the communication model been applied to the topic correctly?" Never assume that students have proven their point by simply plugging in the information to the model. Make sure that the model has been explained clearly. If the model has been altered, make sure students justify why it was done and could be done without distorting the purpose of the model.

Coherence. The critics/judges must ask themselves if the information, claims, and evidence present a plausible explanation for the speaker, speech, or artifact. By creating a well organized and descriptive communication analysis, students can ensure their audience's need for order is met. Since CA is tends to follow a "cookie cutter" format, it may be necessary to search for creative ways to use the pattern. Whatever format is chosen, it must make sense. Complexity is not a treasured virtue of CA.

Effective and complementary delivery styles are an important part in achieving coherence in the speech. CA does not need to be a somber eulogy nor should it be a stand up routine. Students should have commitment for their topics and it should be seen in their performance. They should aim to get the general message across to the audience. The goal is to communicate the same attitude towards the subject that is reflected in the written words. The speech itself should be written in simple oral style. Too often students are trying to fit too much information into ten minutes. They forget that not everyone has heard this speech before this round. Delivery must help the arguments make sense to the audience.

Acknowledgement of subjectivity. It seems competitors have detached themselves from personal commitment. Students attempt to show objectively the strengths and weaknesses of their topic by providing only expert testimonies or substantiated proof from the text itself. While this is necessary to create arguments, it is not the only ingredient necessary for strong arguments. Significance to society is provided in the introduction and again in the conclusion. Rarely, do students acknowledge their interests in the artifact or model. Foss believes

"subjectivity is acknowledged...when the critic admits interests in and involvement with the artifact and explains the nature of the interest and involvement" (25). Students are willing to put time and labor into writing speeches and should recognize the need to reference their personal interpretation of the subject. The reference may only need to be a sentence, but it does need to be present in speeches.

It is the responsibility of the participants, coaches and students, to ask speakers why they feel committed to their topics. Why do students want to spend seven months researching, writing, and revising topics. Reynolds (1985) calls this questioning period "analysis through dialogue". This is where she spends the most intensive and extensive time with her students. Asking: "why is this event interesting; what is unusual about it; what is the communication saying; and if you had to highlight <u>one</u> major factor/element involved in this process, what would it be" (p. 6)? While not all of these questions should be included may not be appropriate in the speech itself, the recognition of subjectivity must at least be apparent to audiences.

<u>Presentation of Choice</u>. Foss' last criteria is that of presenting choices or options. Because time is limited in forensics there is very little room available for addressing other options for analysis of the artifact. While it may be important in written criticisms, in forensics this area is optional. It is important to present speeches as a possibility rather than fact. Recognizing other interpretations of the speech, speaker, or artifact without going into detail does provide audiences with the allusion of choice.

Communication Analysis can be an exciting event to coach and to judge. Time must be taken to understand the event and its foundations in communication theory. Judging a well written criticism can be as exciting as judging finals of After Dinner Speaking if coaches know what they are looking for in speeches. As coaches and especially judges there are many more questions and concerns that should be answered about how to prepare students for competition. With the right resources, coaches can help students develop an appreciation for this challenging event. By combining the information on teaching CA to students and Foss's stance on criticism this paper offers a starting point for developing an attractive plan for coaching. As Bryant said,

criticism serves the function of "adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas." It is time to reawaken the interest in criticism and share it with students so they can share it with the world.

APPENDIX

Communication Analysis: How To Get Started!

Handout given at the Washington Area Forensics Workshop

by Audra L. Colvert

October, 1993

LEARNING THE BASICS

Information adapted from Foss 1989 and Hindman et al 1991

WHAT IS A CA, RC, or RHET CRIT?

They are all acronyms for the term Rhetorical criticism.

A Rhetorical Criticism is the analysis and evaluation of a rhetorical act.

A Rhetorical act is any form of communication--verbal, visual, or auditory that has special significance or interest for you. These acts may include but are not limited to things such as:

SPEECHES:	Martin Luther King's I Had a Dream Speech or Bill Clinton's Inaugural Address
SPEAKER:	Hillary Clinton, Saddam Hussein, Barbra Jordan
MOVEMENT:	Operation Smile & Fat Acceptance
PRINTED ADVERTISEMENTS:	Borden Cow, Reebok Ads, Calvin Klein
FILM:	Schindler's List use of black and white techniques or the parody of the Naked Gun movies
TELEVISION:	Sending messages to advertisers boycotting products
CAMPAIGNS:	"Save the Whales" or "This is your brain on drugs"
LITERATURE:	Romance Novels or imagery in EE Cummings poetry
ETCETERAS:	Music, Social Classes, Religion, Popular Arts, Theater, American West, Cultures, Cartoons, Myths

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Good Question! Everyone does a criticism differently. However, Sonja Foss a leading communication scholar has offered us a solid foundation for starters. Foss claims that there are steps in producing a criticism, they are: 1) discovery of the rhetorical artifact and research question; 2) formulation of the methodology; 3) analysis of the artifact; and 4) writing the critical essay.

CHOOSING A TOPIC

1. **Discovering what to analyze is much like choosing a topic for an informative or persuasive speech.**
   - the topic should be novel
   - the topic should be significant or have a wide appeal

2. **Go and Research This topic.**
   - Find as much on this topic as possible.
   - Get a good feel for the information available

3. **Narrow the topic to be specific**
   - Methodologies look at limited aspects of an artifact
   - Decide what is the most important question you want answered

4. **Question**
   - The question will guide you through your research while narrowing the scope of your research. It makes things manageable.
   - Formulate a thesis question.

     Ask yourself:
     What do I want to know about this subject?
     Can I talk about it in 8-10 minutes?

SELECTING A METHODOLOGY

(Adapted from Sonja Foss, 1989)

The second step in the process of rhetorical criticism is to develop a method, framework, or critical vocabulary to use to analyze the artifact and answer the question that is asked about it.

A method is a way of gaining a perspective on the artifact. No one method can be applied to all rhetorical artifacts, nor is there a "correct" method. The method should be selected or developed that seems to illuminate the significant features of the artifact and to answer the question being asked about it.

The selection of a method usually occurs as the result of one of three processes:

1. ***Use of an Existing Method.***

   • In this approach, the critic discovers that a critical approach already had been devised that is capable of answering the research question being asked.

2. ***Creation of a Method from an Existing Concept.***

   • In some cases, a method does not exist for answering the research question. Here, the critic may create a method from a concept or concepts related to the artifact and the question. This concept may be a theoretical construct from communication or another field.

3. ***Creation of a New Method.***

   • In some instances, the question the critic is asking and the nature of the artifact being analyzed require the development of a method for answering the question that does not rely on constructs, outlines, or theories developed by other rhetorical scholars. Creation of a new method, in this case, is not as difficult as it may seems, for the research question directs the critic to the approach that fits the artifact and allows the question to be answered.

Finding Methodology

Criteria and Methodologies hide in rhetoric books and current journals in the speech communication field. The Quarterly Journal of Speech, Communication Monographs, Communication Studies, Communication Quarterly, Argumentation and Advocacy, and Human Communication Research are examples of journals in communication.

SAMPLE FORMAT

The critic's next task is to investigate and analyze the artifact using the method selected. The writer becomes thoroughly familiar with whatever dimensions the selected method features. For the competitive speech, I have found the following format helpful.

I. Introduction

- attention getting device
- clear description of purpose
- significance of topic--Answering the question "so what?"
- preview of main points

II. Body

A.. Description of the Artifact

- necessary to acquaint the audience with the artifact

B. Description of the Methodology

- A description of the components
- A justification of why the method was selected over other methods
- Definitions of key concepts
- Procedure for using the method

C. Report of the Findings of the Analysis

- This is where you combine A and B
- Make sure you support your findings with outside examples and observations from other sources

D. Interpretation and Evaluation

- You tell your audience what the artifact means
- You evaluate the consequences of the artifact on society

III. Conclusion

- Offers incite and possibly personal observations
- The findings of the analysis may be shown to confirm or deny some aspect of communication theory.
- ties the speech together

JUDGING A COMMUNICATION ANALYSIS

Knowing what to cover in a Communication Analysis is not all there is to producing a solid piece of work. Since it is not possible to prove that your conclusions of the communication act are right or wrong, judges must find additional standards. Four standards which should be used in creating the speech as well as judging a competition are adapted from Foss' stance on criticism, they are:

1. Argumentation:

- Are the claims espoused by the writer/speaker supported? Can the speech be validated from other sources or from the source itself?

2. Coherence:

- Writer/Speaker needs to order and present the perspective in a logical fashion. It helps to present examples and arguments in narrative form.

3. Acknowledgment of Subjectivity:

- Since no interpretation directly reflects reality, when writing the essay present claims "not as truth about reality but simply as one way of describing the artifact or one way of seeing reality"(p.25).

4. Presentation of Choice:

- Was the criticism presented fairly with acknowledgment of opposing views?
- What other methods could have been used to examine this criticism?
- Why is this the best method to for evaluation?

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